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The journey towards developing political consciousness through activism for Mexican American women

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The Journey Toward Developing Political Consciousness Through Activism for Mexican American Women

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This study examined how Mexican American women made meaning of their undergraduate activism and its potential implications on their development toward self-authorship. The developing political consciousness model emerged from their interviews to demonstrate the process of developing increasingly complex social knowledge, the shift of motivation to engage in activism from being a peer expectation to an internalized life calling, and an increasingly complex understanding of political tactics and ability to collaborate with members and other organizations for the goal of achieving political change.

Mexican Americans have a long history of activism aimed toward increasing access to a quality education. They have demanded equitable education by protesting discrimination in the classroom, detrimental educational policies, and segregation—from the early 1900s in court cases challenging segregation in the classroom to the 1968 blowouts of East Los Angeles and the Chicano student movement (MacDonald, 2004). Mexican American college student activism has been examined in a variety of ways by historians (Gutiérrez, 1995), political scientists (Navarro, 2005), and individuals who were part of the Chicano movement (Muñoz, 1989). This has resulted in a myriad of interpretations in regard to the motivations for participating and the significance that these activities had on students' lives. These multiple interpretations may be due to differing theoretical perspectives, none of which include an analysis based on student development theory to investigate how students made meaning of their own activist behaviors.

Applying the lens of student development theory, specifically self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001), to student activism is a new way of examining why students of Mexican heritage may have engaged in activism and the developmental consequences from this engagement. The use of student development theory to understand the motivations for participation in activism—defined here as activities for the purpose of creating social change, such as protest and community engagement—is a major gap in higher education literature as well as in the body of research regarding college student activism. Considering the significant levels of college students' participation in politics and civic engagement, investigating the impact of activism on development is timely and relevant.

This study focused on the following research question: How did Mexican American college women’s student activism at Indiana University (IU) during the 1990s influence their development as viewed through the self-authorship theoretical framework? This re-examination of activism for Mexican American students is critical in considering how ethnic identity development, as well as cognitive and interpersonal development, may affect students who participate in activities that require them to publicly assert their own interpretations of what it means to be Latino and deal with conflict that arises from engaging...
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in political activity that may put them in direct opposition with their peers and/or university administration.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review begins with an overview of self-authorship. Scholarship regarding Latino college students’ self-authoring process follows, focusing on findings that suggest a link between activism and development. Next, I present the concept political consciousness, which is informed by Anzaldúa (1999) and Du Bois’s (1903/2005) conceptualizations of consciousness, which encompass the interconnectivity of social knowledge, identity, and political engagement.

An Overview of Self-Authorship

Baxter Magolda (2001) began a study in 1986 with 101 first-year college students from a predominantly White institution with the intention of examining the influence of gender on cognitive development. As she followed 39 of these participants to their early 30s, she found that their interviews revealed that other developmental dimensions affected their cognitive development. Kegan’s (1982, 1994) theory of meaning making, which emphasizes the intertwining of the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developmental dimensions, informed Baxter Magolda’s interpretations.

Self-authorship is a developmental theory that incorporates “three dimensions of development—how we know or decide what to believe [cognitive dimension], how we view ourselves [intrapersonal dimension], and how we construct relationships with others [interpersonal dimension]” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xix)—and how these dimensions are intertwined in an individual’s developmental journey from being externally defined to developing internalized values that guide life choices. The participants in Baxter Magolda’s study demonstrated four phases of the journey toward self-authorship that illustrated development from external to internal self-definitions. The first phase, following external formulas, refers to following formulas from the external world and lacking the ability to develop one’s own voice. The participants “assume[d] that right and wrong answers exist in all areas of knowledge and that authorities know these answers” (p. 27). The second phase, the crossroads, is instigated with the dissatisfaction of following external formulas. One begins to consider one’s own needs and perspective. The third phase, becoming the author of one’s own life, results in deciding one’s perspective and identity and how to manage relationships with others. The fourth phase, internal formulas, is defined as the management of external influences rather than being controlled by them. One develops interdependent relationships that balances one’s own needs and values, the needs of others, and external circumstances.

The Self-Authoring Process for Latino Students

Considering the impact that life experiences have on the developmental process, research regarding Latino college students was warranted to understand to what extent experiences particular to this population play a role on their development. This new line of inquiry addresses the limitations of Baxter Magolda’s (2001) work, which did not include students of color. This scholarship suggests how political the self-authoring process may be for Latino college students—such as the developmental task of dealing with racism, which may promote social knowledge (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), and the behavior of becoming advocates in the Latino community (Torres & Hernandez, 2007).
The first study that examined the self-authoring process for Latinos was Torres’ longitudinal study of Latino college students. This study examined how cognitive development may influence ethnic identity development (the intrapersonal dimension) for Latino college students (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). This work revealed that development in the cognitive dimension includes the process of reconstructing social knowledge about their Latinos’ identity and critically examining stereotypes about Latinos. This resulted in the development of more positive beliefs about Latino identity.

To continue the investigation of how the developmental process may unfold for Latino college students, Torres and Hernandez (2007) continued the analysis of Torres’s data. The analysis resulted in the Latino holistic development model. Although there were many parallels in the development of these Latino students compared to the students from Baxter Magolda’s (2001) study, there emerged additional developmental tasks specific to this population. One was how identifying and dealing with racism affected their development. The ability to recognize and make meaning of racism (cognitive dimension) was a critical moment in their development to be able to transition from following external formulas to crossroads. This task consisted of “understanding and managing racism and stereotypes that influence their self-image (intrapersonal dimension), and their choices of who they seek out for support and relationships (interpersonal dimension) when dealing with its effects” (Torres & Hernandez, 2007, p. 22). Identification of racism prompted their ability to distinguish and choose between positive and negative aspects of Latino culture and the development of social knowledge about how power and oppression affect their life experiences.

As the participants developed an understanding of the multiple ways of being Latino, they (re)created their ethnic identity based on their cultural choices. This intrapersonal development was demonstrated in the participants who were in the becoming author of one’s life phase. These “informed Latinos” were able to integrate their cultural choices into their relationships and the way they went about their lives. Additional traits of participants who were “becoming authors” were their advocacy for Latinos, which was demonstrated by serving their Latino community or participation in a Latino campus organization. Students at this phase recognized the realities of being Latino in American society and took part in creating alternative paths that considered their limitations and also challenged the status quo. They spoke of their desire to serve the Latino community in volunteer work and/or membership in a Latino-oriented campus organization.

**Political Consciousness—The Intersections Between Politics, Identity, and Activism**

To continue exploring the linkages between social knowledge and activism, I have also examined the work of Anzaldúa’s (1999) *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Du Bois’s (1903/2005) *The Souls of Black Folks*. Their autobiographical accounts articulated a sense of self (or consciousness) that illustrated the interconnectivity of social knowledge, identity, and political engagement. With the work of Anzaldúa and Du Bois in mind, I have chosen the term political consciousness to identify the process in which an individual gains an increasingly complex understanding of politics, how one’s identities influence life experiences, and how one’s awareness of politics and identity influence actions taken to challenge social norms by participating in activism.

Anzaldúa (1999) defined her conceptualization of mestiza consciousness as a level of awareness.
where the possibility of uniting all that is separate [such as identities based in gender, culture, sexual orientation] occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its parts. That third element is a new consciousness—mestiza consciousness. (pp. 101–102)

Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of mestiza consciousness illustrates the process of developing one’s own identities into a new consciousness that is “greater than the sum of its parts.” Mestiza consciousness also indicates an active process (such as balancing opposing powers or working out a synthesis), which further illustrates the connection between growing awareness and action.

Du Bois (1903/2005) discussed his conceptualization of double consciousness, which also can be described as an awareness of his place in American society dictated by his race and how his sense of self was informed by a constant awareness of his marginalized status. He described double consciousness in the following way:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength along keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 143)

Du Bois’s (1903/2005) double consciousness demonstrated action as inherent in this type of consciousness, as did Anzaldúa (1999). The action created from possessing these types of consciousness is the struggle to transcend beyond the conditions in which they found themselves, or in other words, to challenge their social world by breaking down assumptions of Negro or Chicanita identities. As Anzaldúa stated, “The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject–object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (p. 102). Consciousness necessitates action, such as activism in the form of resistance to social norms.

The term political consciousness has been used to describe the development of Chicanismo, which places the use of this term as a reference to the history of Mexican American activism. Chicanismo is an ideology that is nationalistic and “reflects self-respect and pride in one’s ethnic and cultural background” (Muñoz, 1989, p. 194). The 1968 Chicano student manifesto, El Plan de Santa Barbara, discussed political consciousness in a way that inferred it to mean a developing awareness of Latino politics and knowledge of one’s ethnic heritage. Developing Chicano students’ political consciousness was considered critical for motivating them to take action. As stated in El Plan, “political mobilization is directly dependent on political consciousness. As political consciousness develops, the potential for political action increases” (Muñoz, 1989, p. 194).

In summary, this literature review has examined scholarship that suggests a link between students’ development and the behavior of engaging in activism. Research in student development has suggested that students who develop toward becoming informed Latinos are those who choose to advocate for their Latino community as a way to express their ethnic identity. Further demonstrating the interconnections between social knowledge, identity, and political engagement is the conceptualization of political consciousness, a term with historical roots in the Chicano movement and whose
Theoretical Perspective—Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is the theoretical perspective of this study and plays the role of providing "the theoretical stance informing the methodology and thus providing the context for the process and grounding its logic and its criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The use of CRT places racism at a prominent position in this study, which is appropriate as the identification of racism is a critical developmental task for Latino students (Torres & Hernandez, 2007) and history has repeatedly demonstrated that racist experiences (i.e., discrimination, segregation, lack of equitable resources) have motivated activism.

Delgado and Stefancic (2000) defined four basic insights that construct CRT. The first is that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Racism is so well ingrained in this society to the extent that it can be an invisible and a taken-for-granted norm. The second insight is that storytelling offers a different reality from that told in mainstream culture. Storytelling that counters accepted norms may influence the creation of a more equitable and just social construction of reality. “By writing and speaking, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii). The third insight is interest convergence, which is defined as White elites tolerating or encouraging racial advances for Blacks or other oppressed groups only when such advances also promote White self-interest. Often cited examples of interest convergence are the affirmative action policies that ultimately favored White women rather than people of color for whom it was argued that they were created to assist. Fourth, CRT calls for a critique of liberalism. "CRT argues that racism requires sweeping changes but liberalism has no mechanism for such changes" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 13) as liberalism favors the laborious and slow process of litigation to claim rights for people of color.

Critical race theory has been used in higher education research to analyze the Latino college student experience with a focus on examining the effects of race and racism on their academic experience and their developing identity as scholars in a predominantly White environment. The five themes in CRT that form its basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy in education are: the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination, the challenge to dominant ideologies of meritocracy and equal opportunity, the commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential knowledge to illustrate the lived experiences of marginalized persons, and the interdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano, 1998).

In the following section, I detail further how critical race theory complements and informs the choices for the other components of the research design.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Traditionally, the research design for self-authorship studies has utilized grounded theory methodology, often combined with a constructivist epistemology (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Pizzolato, 2003, 2004; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). It is my assertion that the social world (national political attitudes, racism, oppression, cultural history) plays a much more significant role in the experiences that people have and their subsequent development than has been investigated in student development theory scholarship. As such, I developed a research
design that acknowledges more fully the influence of the social world on the lived experiences of the Mexican American women in my study. This review of the research design explains my choices for each component and how they complement each other in a way that allows for the impact of social forces to be investigated in Latino students’ development.

**Epistemology, Theoretical Framework, Theoretical Perspective, and Methodology**

This study was grounded in a social constructionist epistemology. Although constructivism and constructionism have sometimes not been distinguished from each other, constructionism “emphasizes the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things . . . and gives us a quite definite view of the world” (Crotty, 1998). In other words, constructionism indicates a stronger influence of one’s social world (e.g., one’s culture, experiences with racism and privilege) on one’s perspectives compared to constructivism.

The theoretical framework for this study was self-authorship. According to Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006), “the theoretical framework offers suppositions that inform the phenomenon under study . . . [and] links the unsettled question to ‘larger theoretical constructs’” (pp. 24-25). This developmental theory provided the framework to understand how Mexican American women made meaning of the political activities in which they participated. In this sense, the self-authorship framework served as an organizing tool for the investigation of the participants’ meaning making process and informed the construction of the interview protocol.

Critical race theory is the theoretical perspective for this study. CRT is complementary to a constructionist epistemology as both place a strong emphasis on how social structures and social norms influence what types of experiences individuals may have. The use of critical theory in developmental research has only begun to emerge (Abes & Kasch, 2007); the uniqueness of this study is that it was designed with a critical theory from the beginning rather than it being used to re-examine data.

Narrative inquiry, which was the methodology used for this study, “honors people’s stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience or be analyzed for connections between psychological, sociological, cultural, political, and dramaturgic dimensions of human experience to reveal larger meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 478). For this study, I chose to solicit narratives through in-depth interviews. This approach fits well with CRT’s value of giving voice to people of color as a way to communicate the realities of oppression (Solórzano, 1998).

**Participants**

Because this study utilized self-authorship as the theoretical framework, theoretical sampling was used, which is the strategy of sampling particular “people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). The criteria for participants to be considered to be a part of this study were defined as self-identified Mexican American women who were politically active in Latino issues during their undergraduate years at IU, a large, public university in the Midwest. The 1990s timeframe was selected because this was a period of high Latino student activism at this institution. The criterion of the women participants identifying a Mexican heritage was in recognition that this population possesses a distinct political agenda and activist history compared to Latinas with other cultural backgrounds.

Seven women were interviewed, ranging in levels of participation in activism from prominent leaders in elected positions to holding
no office but substantial participation in rallies, protests, cultural events, community service, and organization meetings. Six of the seven women identified as first-generation college students. Two grew up in Texas, a few came from East Chicago (an area with a large population of Latinos), and the others from both urban and rural predominantly White areas in Indiana. Today, 6 of the 7 claim to be still engaged in serving the Latino community by maintaining alumni relations with IU, participating in community service, and/or promoting diversity issues in their work environments.

Data Collection and Analysis
The director of the Latino cultural center, who had the most up-to-date contact information, sent an e-mail invitation to women who met the criteria for the study. The women who responded with interest had their information forwarded to me, and I contacted them to set up an interview. Semistructured interviews were designed with questions to elicit how they made meaning of their activism and to assess their self-authorship. “What role did your college experience play in you identifying as [self-selected ethnic identity]?” investigated the potential links between activism and ethnic identity development (intrapersonal dimension). “Tell me about how you worked with others [such as organization members, administration, other students] whose perspectives differ from yours” investigated actions that the women took and their interpersonal development. The women discussed their experiences as activists and how their college years affected the women they had become. These interviews lasted from 58 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed. Four of the seven interviews were conducted face to face at locations of the participants’ choosing—their home, office, or in an out of way corner in a café. Three were conducted over the phone for participants who no longer lived in the area.

The process of collecting data and analyzing the data was done simultaneously. Memos were drafted after each interview, revisions were made for the interview protocol to examine emerging themes, and coding of the data was done in phases. The open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) yielded a list of codes from the first transcript with the use of Atlas.ti, a software program for coding qualitative data. With the analysis of each subsequent transcript, new codes were added to the list or codes were revised to be more specific or broader. After the coding of four transcripts, a master code list was developed that included all of the codes developed from this first round of analysis as well as descriptions for each code. As the code list had changed from its first iteration after open coding the first transcript to the fourth transcript, the four transcripts were again recoded with the master code list. This list was utilized for coding the final three transcripts as well. In order to reveal emerging themes, data reports of codes I found to be complex and had many quotes were generated with the use of Atlas.ti. These data reports contained all the quotes associated with a particular code. The code was reconsidered as a theme, and the data report was reviewed again for further coding and development of the theme.

This process of simultaneous data collection and analysis also included determining the point at which sufficient data were collected to address the research questions. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), data is to be collected until “no new information is forthcoming” (p. 202). The themes and patterns were found in these interviews consistently, which indicated that the data collected were sufficient for this study. The negative case, which was one participant who felt very differently about her activism in comparison to the other study participants, demonstrated the variation and
range of experiences collected in the data and was included in the analysis of data and development of themes.

Trustworthiness

In this study, I used three strategies that ensured trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, member checks were conducted by sending each participant a summary report that included an overview of all of the interviews as well as a summary of her personal narrative. Second, I conducted peer-debriefing sessions with colleagues (Latino and non-Latino) familiar with identity development research and who had been activists in their own communities. Third, this study included a negative case that was the narrative of one participant who felt very differently about her activism compared to the other women.

Positionality

Narrative inquiry is an approach that relies on the perspectives of the researcher to direct the way that the data are collected and interpreted and for what purpose. Norum (2000) acknowledged how she places herself at the center of her research, which is not a flaw, but a fact that needs to be recognized. My biases and perspective directs my research and shapes the purpose of my work. I must acknowledge how my life experiences influence my interpretation of the participants' narratives.

I am a Mexican American woman who also was politically involved in Latino issues while an undergraduate. Like my participants, I also attended a predominantly White, public university during the 1990s. Our cultural connection and similarities in age and college experiences may give the impression that I possessed an “insider” perspective. These similarities did allow for me to develop rapport and have a stronger understanding of their cultural references than perhaps other researchers with dissimilar identities and college experiences. With this in mind, I took care to consult with others about my data analyses to make sure that I recognized the participants’ own meaning making of their activism and developmental process.

FINDINGS

The interviews of the women in this study revealed how they became involved in activism as undergraduates at IU, how they made meaning of their experiences, and how these activities influenced who they are now as women in their mid-30s. Utilizing self-authorship theory as a lens to view the narratives in this study revealed a developmental process that promoted political consciousness. As they moved toward self-authorship, their social knowledge, motivations for engagement, and political know how became more complex and took into account internalized cultural values. Following are the three central themes derived from the interviews.

Developing Social Knowledge

In this study, the women (who are referred to here by their pseudonyms) discussed how they developed an increasingly complex understanding of their social world and how being Mexican American affected their perspectives and life experiences. As such, their life narratives demonstrate the aspects of developing social knowledge. Two main aspects are illustrated in their stories, which are explained in the following.

Developing an Increasingly More Complex Understanding of the Social World, Which Includes Racism, Oppression, Privilege, and Latino Politics. As the women became part of the Latino community at IU, they learned about the politics and issues of their community. The older students taught the newer members about the community’s most critical issues, including their assessment of what was the cause for them
and what needed to occur to create change. Sylvia remembered how the older LUIU (Latinos Unidos of Indiana University, a Latino student organization) members brought forth the issue of cultural isolation and how they as Latinos needed to stick together as a way to deal with it.

And once you start meeting the older undergrads, you start hearing their explanations: “We’re such a small population, we have to stick together. There’s not that many of us. Start looking around in your classrooms.” And I’m like, “They’re crazy.” And then I start going to class and I’m like, “I think I’m the only Mexican in here.”

Because the Latino community was such a highly political environment, discussions about their cultural marginalization on a predominantly White institution, racist incidents, and disparity of access and resources in higher education for Latinos were opportunities for the women in this study to learn about how power and oppression were manifested in their communities as well as the implications of these social forces in their college experiences.

The activities that these participants attended, which LUIU and/or one of the Latina sororities sponsored, also gave them exposure to the national Latino political discourse. Jennifer’s narrative of her experience at La Marcha, a Latino rights march in October 1996 held in Washington, DC, described how her experience opened her eyes to seeing how issues she discussed in college, such as immigrant rights and access to education, were also discussed across the country. As she stated:

La Marcha was in Washington, DC and it was about the undocumented in our country, workers rights, and affirmation of our roots and our heritage and where we came from and being connected to that. . . . The whole idea that you could be making an impact, that you were part of something that everyone around the nation was, and that everyone around the nation was coming to this.

The other women who discussed La Marcha also shared how it opened their awareness of the national Latino political discourse. Lisa, who was a first-year student the year that she went to La Marcha, quickly learned about Latino political issues by attending this event. As she stated, “You hear the stories and what people are really trying to fight for. I didn’t even know this stuff was happening.”

These narratives illustrate how the women’s awareness of social constructs, such as racism, oppression and privilege as well as Latino politics, increased from their college experiences. It appears that their understanding of these constructs did not involve a reinterpretation of understanding, as none of them spoke of re-evaluating what they had been told or what they believed. Rather, they talked about realizing Latino political issues for the first time, noticing racism that they hadn’t seen before, and realizing that they were being treated differently than their White peers. Their stories demonstrate the process of developing social knowledge as a process by which they came to understand more about their social world and their place in it as determined by their ethnicity.

Developing an Increasingly More Complex Understanding of the Influence of Context in Regard to the Social Norms of the Latino Community and the Multiple Ways of “Being Latina.” The second aspect of developing social knowledge recognizes that knowledge about Latino culture includes an understanding of the multiple ways of “being Latina” and how being Latina in one context may differ in another due to social norms particular to that environment. The women in this study discussed how they came to know the social
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norms of the Latino community at IU, and as a result, they realized the influence that environment may play on how they enact their ethnic identity. They also came to know that there are multiple ways of being Latina, just as there are multiple environments, each having its own social norms and expectations.

For example, the use of “Latina” as the preferred ethnic label was a social norm at IU. As the women in this study remembered, the use of “Latina” to self-identify their ethnicity was a way to build solidarity among the small group of students of Latin American heritage in the IU community. Amelia considered how her choice of ethnic label changes depending on context; Amelia discussed how she preferred the label “Hispanic,” as this was the way she identified herself growing up in her small hometown, but upon arriving at this institution, she realized that this ethnic label had a different, negative meaning to other students.

Sylvia also considered the definition of the ethnic label “Latina” and how she used it:

Sylvia: For me, I think it means someone who comes from Latin American countries. But I get that when people are using the term, they’re trying to encompass everyone. They’re trying to talk about the food, the language, the dress, the music, that whole thing.

Interviewer: You did say that it matters who’s asking you [to self-identify your ethnicity], right?

Sylvia: It does to an extent, depending on what group I’m in. If we’re all in a room and all of us are Latinas, and if they’re using the term, I’m going to just go with the flow. I know who I am.

Sylvia, like the rest of the women, realized the political implications of using “Latina” and also how determining its use was a decision based on meeting social norms of whatever environment in which she found herself. She knew how to negotiate the way she self-identified by “going with the flow,” yet maintaining her own internal sense of her ethnic identity.

Building the capacity to identify social norms leads to identifying what is outside of the norm. Each of the participants discussed her understanding of the social norms for the Latino community in her own way. Some of the women also discussed how they did not meet their community’s assumptions of what being Latina is and how that developed their belief that there are multiple ways of being Latina. Melinda spoke of not meeting the norms of the Latino community and then having to assert within herself her identity as a Mexican American. Recalling her narrative about her incident with a member from LUIU:

I’m pretty fair-skinned. So I don’t know if looking at me folks would identify me as being Mexican or Latina. I think there are some that definitely would when you think about the diversity that exists within the Latino/a community, and I’m even thinking back to my experiences at IU where our shades and complexion vary. . . . I also had experienced later on, again, through my involvement with [the Latino cultural center] where somebody told me in so many words that I wasn’t Latina and it related to my proficiency in Spanish.

As a result of not meeting the assumptions of what a Latina is, she realized the diversity of Latino culture and that there is no singular or “right” way to be Latina. Being outside of the norm made these norms more apparent to her.

Moving Toward Increasing Complexity in Developing Social Knowledge. The women’s narratives indicate how they learned to consider context in choosing how to publicly self-identify as well as the transition from an externally defined understanding of ethnic labels to understanding multiple perspectives. They came to the realization that their peers
had some level of intentionality in their use of ethnic labels, which caused them to begin to consider how they chose to self-identify while also learning the meaning behind “Latino.” Melinda’s narrative is an example of a more complex development of social knowledge. She indicated more internalized cultural choices that she acted upon by continuing to maintain engagement with the Latino community and asserting her place within it regardless if she was openly accepted or not. She, and the other participants who experienced being rejected for not meeting the social norms of being Latina designed their own plan of action and advocated for themselves. Another example of increasing complexity within developing social knowledge was the complex understanding of ethnic labels and the intentional and thoughtful choice of how to self-identify as illustrated by Sylvia. Her understanding of ethnic labels included not only her political understanding of their meanings, but also how context (the social environment) influences the social norms of what labels to use as well as the multiple ways that she may act. She chose to “go with the flow” of the social norms of the Latino community at IU, but she still knew who she was. The choice to work within the social norms of the Latino community while at the same time not letting her actions influence her ethnic identity demonstrates how her social knowledge and decision to use the ethnic label of “Latina” were “contextually interpreted and inclusive of cultural choices” (Torres & Hernandez, 2007, p. 569).

Connections to Self-Authorship. The cognitive dimension of self-authorship refers to an individual’s “assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 15). In other words, the cognitive dimension refers to how people answer the question, “How do I know?” The developmental process begins at receiving and accepting knowledge from authorities to constructing knowledge oneself. Knowledge in the cognitive dimension includes social knowledge, such as an understanding of racism, oppression, and privilege. As demonstrated in the work of Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004), development in the cognitive dimension for Latinos includes a process in which they shift from accepting the validity of cultural stereotypes, to challenging their validity, to ultimately reconstructing these negative messages about their ethnicity into positive ones. This re-evaluation of stereotypes prompts, among other things, development of “social knowledge.”

Developing social knowledge is the cognitive developmental process in which these women demonstrated an increasingly complex understanding of power and oppression in the United States and how being Mexican American influences their perspective and life experiences. In essence, developing social knowledge is developing an understanding that goes beyond the individual understanding of self to an increasingly complex understanding of how the self is in relation to a local community and at the national level regarding Latino culture in the United States.

Developing a Life Calling to Advocate for Latinos

This study allowed further investigation of the motivation to engage in activism by exploring how the participants may have developed the sense of responsibility to advocate for Latinos. Developing a life calling can be described as developing the motivation to advocate for Latinos from a peer expectation to an internalized life calling. The narratives of the women in this study suggest how their motivations to take part in activism indicate a developmental process as they discussed how they were initially motivated by external forces, such as peer expectations, but then their motivation shifted to an internalized sense of
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responsibility to serve the community.

Externally Defined Motivation for Activism. In their recollections of the reasons that the women became part of LUIU, they cited a desire to connect with the Latino community. They did not say that they were particularly interested in becoming activists; rather, they wanted to find a social space to interact with other Latino college students. This desire to find a niche on campus through their connection with the Latino community was illustrated by Melinda:

I think even in the terms of the students that I met through Latinos Unidos, and even La Casa—it was nice to know that there were some familiar faces on campus and some people of color who may relate to my own experience. So it was good to have that connection.

They quickly learned the expectations of fellow LUIU members to become involved in activism. They were told, “We just can’t sit here.” The women realized that they were expected to take part in protests and to be knowledgeable about certain Latino political issues. These women initially engaged in activism because it was a peer expectation. Their motivations were externally defined, as they did what they were expected to do by people whose opinions they strongly valued.

Shift of Motivation to Engage in Activism Toward an Internalized Life Calling. It is unclear how most of the women shifted from being externally motivated by their peers to being engaged in activism to developing an internalized life calling. Although they shared how they believed that their college experiences developed their internalized life calling to advocate for Latinos, they did not explicitly explain how they came to feel the motivation within themselves, nor did they describe a moment in which they realized that they were taking on activism on their own accord with little or negative encouragement from others. What is clear, however, is how they described their life calling to advocate for Latinos. They likened it to an obligation that developed as a result of their developing social knowledge and a growing sense of being able to create change.

The women who described their activism today as a life calling referred to their undergraduate years as a life-changing experience that shaped who they have become. They believed that their activism at IU gave them the opportunity to “stand up for what you believe in” and the experience of being part of creating change. It makes sense that in order to have continued with their activism, they needed to have had experiences that gave them the belief that, through activism, they can create change for their Latino community. Thus, a significant factor in developing an internalized motivation to engage in activism includes experiences that gave them proof that they could be influential change agents. Lisa shared in the following her understanding of Latino politics, her knowledge of power and oppression, and her belief in her role to create the change necessary for the Latino community:

It’s infuriating when you get involved in that stuff, especially when you realize what kind of opinion people might have of who you are. Just when you start to see the real issues behind so much more, the worst that could happen would be to let people have these kinds of beliefs or letting them act on them. . . . It was a time at school where you just felt like this is who I want to be, this is what I want to do, and this is important to me. You start to realize those types of things. Like I said before, you’re growing to know who you are. So the more and more you see that, the more it just drives you do to more. . . . If I don’t do this, if I don’t get involved, and then later something happens, I can only sit there and complain to myself and take this all on myself because I didn’t either give support or go and spend time at those meeting.
Lisa shared how she connected her commitment to activism with a heightened level of awareness of oppression and racism. This awareness motivated her to remain engaged with activities that advocated for Latinos. Realizing that others may not have the same ability or opportunity to fight for Latino rights gave Lisa a sense of responsibility to her community. This responsibility to the community was further developed from her belief that if she didn’t do something to address inequality, then she would have to deal with the guilt of knowing she could have done something but chose not to.

Other women talked about how their engagement in the Latino community helped them become the people they are today. Teresa commented on how being active as an undergraduate influenced how she saw herself as a Latina and how she connected her sense of self to activism:

Standing up for what you believe in. I think that’s truly it. . . . I learned more in college that if this is truly what you believe in and this is the legacy that you want to leave for your children or for yourself, or this is how you want people to remember you, you’ve got to stay true to who you think you are.

Teresa commented that she did not see her life calling as an overly naïve ambition to save the Latino community, but she did see it as enacting her value to advocate for Latinos, as she shared later:

[My family] realized that that’s something you believe in then you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do. It’s your life and you do with it what you need to do. So my sisters, half of the time they’re like, “Why are you going to save every Latino in the country?” I say, “No, that’s not it. This is just what I believe in. This is what I stand for and this is what I want to do.”

The comments of Lisa and Teresa demonstrate that they consider themselves as women who have internalized their advocacy work for the Latino community into how they identify themselves. They have explained that their growing understanding of Latino issues and politics has motivated them to be advocates and also has given them a sense of responsibility to the community. Advocating for Latinos is not just what they do, it is who they are. They have internalized the value of advocacy into their identities.

The negative case of the participant who no longer was an advocate for the Latino community demonstrates the importance of experiencing success in creating change in order to shift from external motivation to an internalized life calling. She made meaning of her undergraduate experiences as putting too much investment of time and effort to a cause that in the end did not give her the success she expected. Although she was a leader in the Latino community at IU, she did not realize the change that she strove to achieve. She considered her work unsuccessful, and she did not internalize a desire to serve the Latino community.

Connections to Self-Authorship. The second dimension of self-authorship, the intrapersonal dimension, refers to identity development. It addresses the question, “Who am I?” Development in this dimension involves the process of reworking one’s sense of self. Development starts from a received identity from family and other influential people, to exploring the multiple ways of enacting an identity, to finally constructing one’s own identity (Baxter Magolda, 2001). For Latinos, the intrapersonal dimension includes ethnic identity development (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). The developmental process is movement from accepting a received ethnic identity, which includes accepting the way that one’s family identifies her ethnicity and accepting the validity of negative stereotypes, to challenging
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her received identity, to developing her own
definition of Latino culture, and then to acting
it out in her life. Individuals who were at the
phase of becoming author of one’s own life
chose to advocate for Latinos. The narratives
here depicted a shift from external motivations
to be activists to internal motivations based
on a desire to live out a Latino identity that
includes the value of serving one’s community.

Developing Political Acuity

In this study, the narratives illustrate the
process of developing political acuity by which
the women’s skills in leadership and know how
in engaging in activism increased in complexity
and the ability to create substantive change. All
of the participants discussed how they worked
with other members of the organizations to
which they belonged, some discussed how
they interacted with university administration,
and a few discussed their leadership styles.
Their stories provide a broad understanding
of how their undergraduate experiences
were a developmental process in developing
political acuity to know how to maneuver
these relationships while keeping in mind
political strategies. Reviewing the women’s
development of interpersonal skills in working
with other Latinos and non-Latinos for the
purpose of creating change yielded the two
aspects of developing political acuity.

Developing an Increasingly Perceptive Ability
to Understand the Needs and Goals of Others
for the Purpose of Building Effective Working
Relationships. Activism is, for the most part, a
group activity that requires the collaborative
efforts of group members. Several of the
women discussed working with people in their
organizations who had different perspectives
and ways of expressing themselves. The ability
to understand others’ perspectives and work
with them in a mutually beneficial way ranged
among the participants, which demonstrates
the developmental aspect of developing
political acuity. Working relationships were
developed in different levels: between individu­
als and between organizations.

The developmental process of building
effective working relationships among group
members. The undergraduate years were a time
when the women experienced conflict within
their organizations as a result of multiple
perspectives and varying levels of maturity.
The participants in this study illustrated how
they struggled to work through, or avoided,
conflict within their organizations. Their
stories illustrate varying levels of the ability to
build effective working relationships and the
various strategies that they employed.

When Amelia was asked how she worked
through conflict resulting from multiple
perspectives, she replied,

I don’t think the way I dealt with it
would have been different from anybody
else. What did I try to do? I just whined
a lot to my friends. . . . I was trying to
be a peacekeeper. When you’re trying to
be a peacekeeper, people take things the
wrong way. I think I just dealt with it as
just moving forward. If people weren’t
happy with it I just kept doing what I
was supposed to do . . . I just ignored
everybody else’s personalities and conflicts
and kept plugging along to get it done.
. . . We were not letting any factors stop
us. We just kept doing what we were
supposed to do.

This individual’s reflection on her leadership
style did not acknowledge the needs of others
and her avoidance to work toward a mutually
beneficial working relationship. She often found
herself doing a lot of the organization’s work on
her own. This narrative illustrates an externally
defined way of viewing relationships as she
avoided interactions outside of her comfort
zone. In this case, it was avoiding confrontation
with other members by ignoring them and
choosing to continue her own agenda.

This woman’s approach to handling
conflict within an organization contrasted with the more collaborative approach voiced by Lisa, who believed in hearing the voices of members and recognizing that there was going to be diversity in opinions, backgrounds, and concerns. Lisa shared how she developed sensitivity to the needs of organization members. She considered herself perceptive to the morale of her group members, and she worked toward building positive morale. She recognized the difficulty of hearing the concerns of various people and yet being able to move forward in a direction that met everyone’s goals.

You pick up on the way people work together, people who are better fits on some things. You can see conflicts or other issues with people. I think you just pick up things with people a little easier. What we did was we . . . made people feel comfortable enough to tell us anything. We were more approachable. . . . They would come and tell us, or e-mail us, or call us, or we would meet together and talk about some things, and take it into consideration.

Lisa wanted to develop working relationships in which both she and the other member worked with each other and brought to the relationship their best skills. Although her leadership style seemed more effective than others, Lisa recognized that she had difficulty with people being displeased with her even when she knew that she could never please everyone all of the time. Lisa reflected on how she wanted to help members but that it became problematic when they would not take responsibility for their wants by doing for themselves. She still struggled with developing interdependent relationships, which indicates that she had not achieved the level of internal foundations where an individual may not feel internal conflict from dealing with others’ expectations.

None of the participants illustrated a strong ability to understand the needs and goals of others for the purpose of building effective working relationships while remaining authentic to her own values. Considering the difficulty in this task, this is understandable. However, their reflections provide their own evaluations on how effective they were in this aspect of leadership and where they were developmentally as undergraduates. Their stories illustrate the spectrum of the skill of developing effective working relationships.

The developmental process of building effective working relationships with other organizations. Some of the women shared how they, as representatives of their own organizations, developed an ability to create coalitions with other organizations for the purpose of building a stronger political voice. At IU, the collaborative efforts extended to organizations for students of color. In order to effectively build these coalitions, these women needed to present their organization’s political agenda in a way that was relevant to the needs of the other organizations. Jessica spoke of how, as a member of LUIU, she was part of developing a coalition among Asian and African American student organizations and the Latino law student association for the purpose of protesting a university proposal that would have consolidated various advocacy offices into one Office of Multicultural Affairs:

The law students really helped us with policy—understanding the law and understanding policy and how to write policy because as an undergraduate you’re not doing that unless you’re in political science. . . . The Asian students, of course they were going to lose more than we were. They really saw our perspective when we started to speak to these folks about [the proposal]. We [considered] what are the needs of the Asian community and what are the needs of the Latinos? The African Americans kind of started to see that, “Hey,
these folks are organizing and maybe we need to get organized too.” They at the end got on board. We got together and thought, “Hey, what are our needs?” . . . It wasn’t a give-or-take situation with Asian and Latinos because our needs were similar.

Jessica’s reflections reveal how each organization was brought into this political campaign, first the Latino law student association, then the Asian student organizations, and finally the African American organizations. The question of “what are our needs?” illustrated the focus on finding that common ground and developing a “we” mentality that would solidify their coalition. As Jessica’s narrative illustrates, she had to have an understanding of the multiple perspectives of those with whom she wanted to collaborate in order to know how to develop a common goal that all groups involved would want to support.

Developing an Increasingly Complex Understanding of the Effectiveness of Particular Political Strategies Based on Context, Needs, and Others Involved. Developing political acuity includes the interpersonal skills necessary to work effectively between individuals, organizations within an institution, in addition to the ability to create a political strategy that is cognizant of context and goals. Few of the women discussed developing an understanding of the effectiveness of political strategies, as most of them seemed to consider how activism affected their own development, not how effective their behaviors were in achieving the goals they set forth in their activism. In the following, the developmental range of this aspect of developing political acuity is illustrated from the women’s life narratives.

Externally defined understanding of political strategies. Sylvia discussed her assumptions of how political change occurred. It was externally defined, as she believed that her role was to raise awareness of a particular issue and it was the responsibility of those in power to make the necessary changes to address it. She did not consider how the change needed to occur, such as the resources required or the policy that needed to be revised. Nor did she consider the extent to which university administrators had the power and influence to be able to create the change she wanted. When change did not occur, she did not critically evaluate possible reasons for it. She assumed that the university administration did not wish to create change. She did not assess if her political strategy was the most effective, nor did she consider alternative strategies. In the following, she revealed her assumptions of the power of administrators to create change:

Another thing that happened was when [a campus administrator] was going to take office. And so he came to La Casa to talk to us. A lot of the concerns we were expressing to him were you’re bringing Latinos to the campus but they’re not staying, they’re not graduating. You say that this is supposed to be a culturally diverse university but it’s really not. Putting a picture of us in a pamphlet doesn’t help. We need [Latino] professors. We need [Latino] instructors. We need [Latino] people who will hold higher positions within the university. And he reassured us. That’s also when [administrators] were talking about closing the Office of Latino Affairs. He reassured us that there wasn’t going to be a clumping of all of the organizations, that he was going to work on retention, that that was important, that he was going to try to bring in instructors and other professionals into the university. And it didn’t happen.

Sylvia believed that the campus administrator had the resources and authority to address the needs that she and her fellow LUIU members identified. She was disappointed that he didn’t live up to the promises that he made.

Developing an internalized understanding of political strategies. Jessica, on the other
Jessica believed her role in activism was to influence those in power with persuasive arguments that were cognizant of policy and institutional context:

If you just do something correct, within certain parameters of course, and really use your resources, you can make a difference and have some sort of impact. The higher power [administration] . . . is listening and watching. Sometimes they are not able to give us what we want.

Distinct from Sylvia, who believed that her role in creating change ended in raising awareness and that authority figures were responsible to make changes, Jessica considered her role to be substantially more complex. She believed the best strategy was to work within the system to influence those in power to create change. She also believed that it was her responsibility to “know what you’re talking about” by understanding the political context, institutional policy, and the steps necessary to achieve the political objectives she wanted to achieve. She also realized the existence of institutional barriers, even for the university leadership, that would prohibit them from “giving us what we want.” Jessica balanced her belief of her own ability to create change with the political realities of knowing that change involves the support of multiple people.

**Connections to Self-Authorship.** The third dimension of self-authorship refers to the interpersonal developmental process. This dimension asks the question, “What relationships do I want?” and considers how one makes sense of and constructs her relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2001). For Latinos, the interpersonal dimension also considers the cultural orientation of the individual by examining how one interacts with other Latinos and non-Latinos. The developmental movement begins with individuals avoiding interacting with people who are outside of their comfort zone and moves to experiencing
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diversity that may result in ease with people from multiple cultures and perspectives and then to renegotiating relationships that honor their internalized cultural values and recognizes the context of a diverse environment (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). In this study, the interpersonal developmental process was illustrated in how the women negotiated relationships with organization members and university administration as well as the extent to which they recognized how their actions moved forward their political agendas.

Emergent Model—Developing Political Consciousness

The analysis from this study resulted in a model that illustrates the three dimensions of self-authorship as it relates to the process of developing political consciousness (see Table 1). This developmental process incorporates the development of social knowledge, which includes an understanding of political issues and power and oppression (cognitive dimension); the extent to which advocacy for Latinos is an internalized value (the intrapersonal dimension); and the ability to understand the needs of members, allies, and opponents as well as to take into account context in developing political strategies (interpersonal dimension). This model is informed by the Latino holistic development model (Torres & Hernandez, 2007), which indicates a link between activism and development. This study continued the investigation of the developmental processes involved for a Mexican American woman that may lead to her engagement in activism as well as the meaning and intention behind those actions.

Each of the dimensions of self-authorship manifested in developing political consciousness is illustrated in the table. Each row depicts a dimension of self-authorship: developing social knowledge (cognitive), developing a life calling to advocate for Latinos (intrapersonal), and developing political acuity (interpersonal). Within each dimension,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Authorship Dimension</th>
<th>Development Processes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How do I know?</strong></td>
<td>Developing Social Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>- Developing an increasingly more complex understanding of the social world, which includes racism, oppression, privilege, and Latino politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Developing an increasingly more complex understanding of the influence of context in regard to the social norms of the Latino community and the multiple ways of “being Latina”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who am I?</strong></td>
<td>Developing a Life Calling to Advocate for Latinos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>- Developing the motivation to advocate for Latinos from an peer expectation to an internalized life calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What relationships do I want with others?</strong></td>
<td>Developing Political Acuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>- Developing an increasingly perceptive ability to understand the needs and goals of others for the purpose of building effective working relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Developing an increasingly complex understanding of the effectiveness of particular political strategies based on context, needs, and others involved</td>
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the developmental process from external definitions to internal formulas is described.

DISCUSSION
This study provided an opportunity for women activists to share their stories about their experiences as Mexican American college women. Their recollections illustrated how they made meaning of their activism in regard to who they are today. Findings from this study revealed a new model, developing political consciousness, based on self-authorship theory, that illustrates how one’s level of development may affect the meaning and motivation to engage in activism and vice versa. For the women in this study, this process of developing toward self-authorship included an increasingly complex political awareness of how their ethnicity has influenced their lived experiences and the way that they see the world.

Contributions to Research in College Student Activism
This model proposes a new direction for activism research as it allows one to reconsider the reasons and motivations behind Mexican American women’s activism that is grounded in developmental theory. Various scholars from several fields have their own conclusions regarding the motivations of Chicano college students’ reasons for engaging in activism—ranging from students being “self-indulgent” individuals seeking political power to students having a genuine interest in creating positive change in their communities.

At its best, the work of student activists has been seminal in its influence on much later activity as well as generously courageous in its militancy; at its worst, it has been anarchic and self-indulgent, given to rhetoric and organizational inconsistency. (Gomez-Quinones, 1990, pp. 119-120)

What was missing from all of these works of Mexican American activism (Gomez-Quinones, 1990; Gutierrez, 1995; Munoz, 1989; Navarro, 2005) is the insight that motivation to engage in activism may change over time due to phase of development in self-authorship. For example, the need to become a member of LUIU and engage in this organization’s activism for an externally defined individual may be based on seeking acceptance from the Latino community and meeting their peers’ expectations, whereas an self-authored individual may be internally motivated to find a group that is congruent with her values and interests with little to no motivation from peers. The use of the developing political consciousness model may provide insight into how a particular political behavior (engaging in activism) has different meanings and purpose depending on where a person may be on her journey toward self-authorship.

Contributions to Research in Latino Student Development
This study was grounded in prior work that has begun to reveal the self-authoring process for Latinos. This empirical work sought to refine a particular aspect of self-authorship theory, and its theoretical grounding required a research design that was theoretically grounded and specifically focused on a selected group of participants who could be most informative for the investigation of linkages between activism and development. In several ways, it has expanded understanding of key concepts and has added further depth and complexity to understanding of Latino development and self-authorship theory in each of the three dimensions. These contributions are in part attributed to the research design that incorporated a constructionist epistemology and CRT theoretical perspective, which allowed for a more intensive investigation of how the
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social world influences individual development.

In regard to investigating the complexity of development within the cognitive dimension, this study has further defined the concept of “social knowledge” introduced by Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004). In addition to social knowledge being inclusive of racism and stereotypes, the developing political consciousness model also includes other social forces that are informed by contemporary society and the environment in which Latinos find themselves. I have expanded the concept of social knowledge to include an understanding of Latino politics and the ability to identify the social norms of the Latino community in which they find themselves, including the community’s preferences and definitions for ethnic labels and how to be Latina. Consistent with Torres and Baxter Magolda’s findings, there appears to be a strong interconnection between development in the cognitive dimension and the intrapersonal dimension in this study. This study found that the more aware a Latina is about her social world, the more likely she may be internally motivated to advocate for her Latino community and make this advocacy work part of who she is.

For the intrapersonal dimension, the findings from this study challenge prior findings that Latinos who were in the becoming the author of one’s life phase of self-authorship exhibit the behavior of advocating for Latinos (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). This study found that women engaged in activism throughout the various stages of self-authorship. The participants in this study shared that they engaged in activism for externally defined reasons that were based on meeting the approval and expectations of their peers. As they moved toward self-authorship, advocacy became an expression of their Mexican American identity.

This study also contributes further understanding of self-authorship in the interpersonal dimension. The developing political acuity dimension of the developing political consciousness model recognizes the developmental process of building working relationships with others for the purpose of achieving organizational and political goals. Prior work has focused more on familial and other intimate relationships to investigate individuals’ development in the interpersonal dimension; however, my inclusion of more public relationships in assessing interpersonal development is a result of more fully recognizing the influence that one’s social world plays. This work acknowledges that development in this dimension includes negotiating relationships with group members, building coalitions, and developing the political savviness to understand institutional norms and what actions may yield the most effective results.

Although none of the participants discussed being involved with service-learning, the developmental impact of serving their community and advocating for others is consistent with prior research that indicated how service-learning may influence students’ sense of self and their lifelong desire to serve their community. In a study by Jones and Abes (2004) that investigated the impact of service-learning on identity development and self-authorship, the participants discussed years later how their experiences influenced their desire to continue community service and how it had become a part of their identity. The students, expressed “a movement from more external reasons (e.g., requirement for a class, resume-builder, peers were involved) for participating in service to internal motivations (e.g., consistent with their values, sense of who they were and want to become)” (p.154), as well as a desire to continue serving the community years after their “service high.” These findings are consistent with developing a lifelong calling to advocate for Latinos, which also indicates the shift of motivation
from external expectations to an internalized life calling. In addition, there were similarities in how the students in Jones and Abes’s study expressed their growing understanding of privilege and oppression, much like developing social knowledge. The service-learning curriculum allowed for students to reflect on developing “an awareness of economic and education privilege and the advantages accompanying such privilege” (Jones and Abes, 2004, p. 155). The participants in my study reflected on issues of privilege and oppression in their conversations with peers about Latino politics and their cultural isolation at IU. The consistencies between this study and the work by Jones and Abes in regard to the developmental effects of advocacy on college students strongly suggest transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to other populations who engage in similar activities.

Implications for Working with Latino College Student Activists

Oftentimes, those working in higher education consider activism to be a disruptive activity that needs to be quelled. Students who are activists may be perceived as being more interested in creating controversy than in progressing a cause. This study challenges assumptions that higher education may have toward activism by reconsidering this activity from being a disruptive behavior to one that encourages the development of a more complex understanding of social issues and may facilitate a life-long commitment to serve one’s community. Considering the call for colleges and university to develop civically engaged citizens out of their students (e.g., Greater Expectations, a publication by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002), educators may consider activism as a learning opportunity to experience first-hand civic engagement and then reflect on the following:

- Their knowledge of the issue at hand as a way to connect the rhetoric to Latino politics both at the national and local levels (developing social knowledge);
- The reasons why they are engaging in the activism to consider if their motivation to be involved is to be connected to the Latino community and/or a desire to enact their desire to advocate for the community in a meaningful way that challenges the status quo (developing a life calling to advocate for Latinos); and
- How they went about engaging in the activism and if the result was what they had hoped for; if not, what other tactics may have been used to achieve the goals? (developing political acuity).

Students who may be in the external formulas phase certainly may be involved in activism in order to find acceptance from their peers, however, educators can facilitate the process of them developing social knowledge that can transition their activism to become an activity that is purposeful and develops civic engagement. This study has demonstrated the strong linkage between developing social knowledge and developing a life calling to advocate for Latinos. The women in this study spoke about the impact that cultural events and class assignments regarding social issues had on the development of their social knowledge. Educators can promote learning of social issues and politics in the classroom as well as encourage students to attend cultural events. Bringing students’ activism experiences into the classroom may also further develop their social knowledge, as this may encourage students to critically analyze their own actions in regard to the impact that their work has on creating change and how their behaviors affect their developing identity.
Limitations and Future Research

The main objective of this study was to examine how Mexican American women activists from one university in the Midwest made meaning of their political behaviors during the 1990s. This study was limited to a very selective group of women who met the criteria to be a part of this study. Findings from this study should not be considered generalizable to the experiences of all Mexican Americans who have engaged in activism; rather, the thick descriptions developed may “enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

This study has been able to draw out the content of each dimension of the developing political consciousness model with broad strokes. Further research needs to take place to flesh out this model to more fully examine how each phase of self-authorship within each dimension of this model is achieved and how each phase is illustrated. It may also be insightful to collect narratives of individuals at different points in their lives, such as people still in college and alumni a few years after graduation and/or more than 10 years afterward. This may reveal how the meaning of college experiences may change over the years as people develop, mature, and experience major life events. The inclusion of older adults in a future study is especially warranted, as understanding of the developmental processes toward achieving the internal foundations phase is limited in self-authorship research.

Furthermore, because of the sample used to develop this model was limited to a very small and specific group, future work will need to include a more diverse sample size in regard to age, gender, race/ethnicity, and region of the United States to determine its applicability to other populations. Future research could address if this model is applicable to Mexican American male activists and/or if this model can be applied to other student activists of color as well as other disenfranchised groups.

Despite these limitations, this study has demonstrated how engaging in activism may yield significant developmental outcomes: developing awareness of one’s social world, how ethnicity influences life experiences, and effective ways to navigate the political environment. Indeed, these outcomes are desirable, not only to help students move toward self-authorship, but also to develop civically engaged persons who will remain committed to their communities long after college. As César Chávez stated, “The end of education should surely be service to others” (United Farm Workers, 2006).

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